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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 16 October 1992, at 3 p.m.

President:	Mr. AKSIN (Vice-President)	(Turkey)
later:	Mr. HAYES (Vice-President)	(Ireland)

- Social Development: (a) Questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family [93] (continued)

  International Conference on ageing and celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing:

  (i) Reports of the Secretary-General
  (ii) Draft resolution

- Programme of work

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Aksin (Turkey), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 93 (continued)

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: (a) QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AGEING AND CELEBRATION OF THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING:

(i) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/47/339, A/47/369)

(ii) DRAFT RESOLUTION (A/47/L.5/Rev.1)

The PRESIDENT: This afternoon the General Assembly, in accordance with the decision taken at its 3rd plenary meeting and pursuant to resolution 46/91, is holding the fourth and last of the plenary meetings devoted to an international conference on ageing and to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, under sub-item (a) of agenda item 93.

Mr. VAJPAYEE (India): Ageing is a global phenomenon and therefore is of universal concern. The statistics on ageing are alarming, and we are perhaps moving towards an "age-quake," as the representative of the Dominican Republic warned us yesterday. The Secretary-General's reports, "Implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing" (A/47/369) and "Global targets on ageing for the year 2001: a practical strategy" (A/47/339) are timely and informative and provide us with broad guidance for the tasks ahead over the next decade. We agree with his assessment of the need for continuing dialogue, cooperation and initiative by all the agencies and Governments concerned.

(Mr. Vajpayee, India)

We know from the reports of the Secretary-General that by the year 2001 the world's population is expected to reach 6.3 billion, of which 10 per cent will be 60 years of age or older. More than 80 per cent of this population will be in the developing world. This constitutes a challenge for all future Governments and societies, and calls for changes, perhaps drastic, in social attitudes as well as in governmental policies, to meet these new problems. The first part of the next century will see a dramatic increase in the number of the aged. However, this will be occurring at a time when traditional family structures are weakening with the increase in the number of women seeking employment; many traditional old-age support systems will be slowly disappearing. This is why it is of primary importance that we should look into the situation urgently.

We cannot escape the fact that, as the proportion of senior citizens to younger people increases, worker-pensioner conflicts are likely to increase. We fully support the remedial measures suggested in the report: introducing flexible working arrangements to enable older people and women to join the work force; increasing the numbers of young immigrants; and increasing individual preparations for old age, including life-long education, job retraining, healthful lifestyles, savings, and security of family and community ties.

Ageing is a phenomenon which will affect every one of us some day. With ageing, especially in the years after 80, come a number of associated problems, such as fractures, loss of vision and other disabilities which require constant care and attention. Even in the developing societies which have strong family bonds, trends are likely to change 20 or 30 years hence. All this requires a better financed and better coordinated system of help for the aged and for their integration into, and greater participation in, society.

(Mr. Vajpayee, India)

The World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, in which 120 countries participated, adopted an International Plan of Action on Ageing. The Assembly provided an occasion to assess the changed social scenario for the care of the aged and initiate programmes for their well-being. The Plan has served as a blueprint for policies around the world in the last decade. But all its goals have not been reached. While industrial countries have come to terms with reality and have adopted national policies to help their senior citizens, developing countries, perhaps because of their traditional age-support system and fewer resources, have not been equally responsive. We need to act.

The targets on ageing for the next decade from 1992 to 2001 set out in the Secretary-General's report are ambitious and provide a good basis for national Governments to follow. The objectives are support for countries in setting up their own national targets, and integrating "ageing" into national and international developmental plans, while generating support for community-based programmes. The other major target is research into the subject, including facilitation of closer global cooperation. On the national plane specifically, it calls for strengthening national coordination mechanisms and national funding processes, data bases and training centres, preventing discrimination with respect to older persons and promoting intergenerational policies and programming. These, I agree, would promote all-round "productive ageing".

India made a modest beginning very early in its Five-Year Plans to tackle the problems of ageing. Among the initiatives taken were the establishment in 1950 of a training centre for the adult blind at Dehra Dun and inaugurating a programme of old-age pensions for those elderly without means or support. The Eighth Five-Year Plan 1992-1997 has also allocated some funds in the national budget for the care of the aged.

(Mr. Vajpayee, India)

The Indian Government has also constituted an interministerial committee for the welfare of the aged. The Committee's terms of reference are: first, to examine the recommendations of the round-table discussions on the care of the elderly organized by the indian Council of Medical Research and other medical and family planning bodies, and suggest ways and means of implementing them; secondly, to consider the draft national policy on care of the elderly suggested at the round-table discussions and suggest a policy framework for adoption; and, thirdly, to suggest programmes for the care and protection of the elderly, in keeping with the changing socio-economic conditions, and also for the utilization of their services and experience, with a view to supplementing their income and channelizing their energies into community support activities.

There has been increasing social awareness in recent years in India of the plight of the elderly destitute. This has also been due to media participation. Most States in India operate some kind of social assistance programmes, for which the qualifying ages vary from 55 to 65 years. The United Nations report on the world ageing situation in 1991 cites under country examples the Indian case, with the comment that, although the Indian programme falls short of any optimum solutions, it demonstrates the country's commitment and resolve to do something about the problem, and that, given its economic priories and constraints as a developing country, the Indian programmes go far beyond those in many other developing countries, some of which are much more economically prosperous. India has also been favourably cited for its tremendous achievements in controlling the problem of blindness, especially among the aged. India was the first country to set up eye camps, where over a 10-year period 9.5 million cataract operations have been performed.

(Mr. Vajpayee, India)

Indian society today is strongly supportive of its elder population, and the extended family is the best illustration of this. It is often compared to the banyan tree, with a strong supporting trunk and many subsidiary shoots. The older generation within the extended family provides not only moral support for the younger members but also the fabric which intertwines all generations. In fact, they are a factor of stability in a strong family unit, the basic structure of society.

(Mr. Vajpayee, India)

The Charter of Rights for the Aged that evolved last year contains a crucial right - the right to work. This is a fundamental right that is observed daily in developing societies. What the aged in developing societies need is a better funded system and a better coordinated plan to ensure that people's right to work is not compromised as they age. Last year the Secretary-General inaugurated the Banyan Fund, which is supported voluntarily. That Fund, along with the Trust Fund, should focus on giving support to the most needy. It would also be useful to inaugurate more research-oriented institutes on ageing in Asia, which has more than half of the world's population.

Ageing is a fact of life that affects every generation and every society. Twentieth-century advances in science and medicine, while having given mankind greater life expectancy, have also dramatically increased the proportion of the aged among us. We can come to grips with this fact only through understanding and cooperation, as it is unlikely that its consequences will be confined within national borders. For that reason we support the comprehensive draft resolution containing the "Proclamation on Ageing", submitted by the Dominican Republic on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

Mr. BARO (Senegal) (interpretation from French): The delegation of Senegal has a special interest in taking part in this discussion, which is part of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing. Senegal, which had the privilege of hosting, from 10 to 14 December 1984, the African Conference on Gerontology, the first meeting of its type on African soil, attaches the greatest importance to the need to deal with questions pertaining to the elderly.

(Mr. Baro, Senegal)

This is why at the national level the Government of Senegal has adopted a number of measures in relation to the elderly. They include the granting of ad hoc assistance, the abolition of income tax on pensions and exemptions from property tax for aged people the rental value of whose property is less than CFAF 70,000, or approximately $230, which is at least twice the monthly rent paid by a family. Furthermore, the widows of deceased retired persons may, if they are over 45 years of age, retain the widow's pension in the event of their remarrying.

Our Government has also fostered the setting up of national organizations for retired people and the aged, with branches throughout the country. Members of these organizations have experience in all spheres of national life, and they are involved in several development programmes, as well as in training and joint-action units.

The most dynamic of these organizations is the National Federation of Pensioners and the Elderly of Senegal, which includes retired people from the private and public sectors, as well as other older people. It, too, has branches throughout the country, and it provides an ideal framework for multidisciplinary joint action on all questions pertaining to the ageing of the population.

We have also set up a national committee and regional committees on ageing. These include representatives of technical Ministries, certain public and private institutions and elderly and retired people. The Committee's functions include studying ways and means to improve the living conditions of the elderly and suggesting measures to help us to cope with the economic and social implications of ageing and the harmful effects of structural adjustment policies on the living conditions of elderly people.

(Mr. Baro, Senegal)

The committees also take part in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of programmes of activities for the annual National Day of the Elderly, organized to inform the Senegalese people about issues pertaining to ageing and heighten their awareness of the role and special place of the elderly in society.

Among these important measures are policies that the Government of Senegal has pursued with a view to fostering conditions conducive to taking advantage of the knowledge and know-how of the aged and involving them further in civil and moral education for the benefit of the younger generation. In accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, our country is taking all the necessary steps to enhance the participation and involvement of the elderly in the development process. This has enabled older women to play a leading role in the informal sector, thereby reducing their economic dependence and helping to lessen the financial burden on the working population.

In the field of medical services, Government action has led to the creation of a research and education unit, whose activities have made possible a better understanding of the biological ageing process. Within the framework of the social goal "Health for all by the year 2000", the medical follow-up of elderly persons has been implemented. This has led to the setting up of an appropriate health-education programme, to bringing primary health care services to the people and to training geriatric care personnel.

Those developments demonstrate that, despite its socio-economic difficulties, Senegal continues to do its utmost to protect the place of the elderly in traditional society. Certainly there are still many challenges to be met, especially in health care, with the increase in the numbers of elderly suffering from diabetes, heart disease and eye problems - not to mention the

(Mr. Baro, Senegal)

accelerated ageing of the rural population and the decline in agricultural productivity resulting from the massive migration of the young.

This situation, which is to be found throughout Africa, is aggravated everywhere by our modest means. Therefore, our efforts cannot be effective without sustained international solidarity in the implementation, at the national and regional levels, of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

As regards regional cooperation, Senegal is the location of the headquarters of the African Society of Gerontology, which as representatives know, was formed to cope with the current situation of the elderly on the continent and to prepare for the ageing of the population. According to the Secretary-General's report (A/47/369), this will pose grave problems in the next century. Therefore, the delegation of Senegal would like to take this opportunity to thank intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that are helping the African Society of Gerontology draw up programmes and projects on ageing in Africa. The society needs consistent, substantial support if it is to achieve its goal of establishing services for the aged and encouraging African Governments to take initiatives in this sphere.

(Mr. Baro, Senegal)

In this regard it is desirable that the special United Nations Trust Fund for Ageing provide funding for the African Society of Gerontology so that it may become operational. We agree with the Secretary-General, who in his report (A/47/369) rightly points out that for lack of new contributions the Fund will not be in a position to meet requests for assistance made by developing countries. That is why the Senegalese delegation joins those who have appealed to the international donor community to contribute generously to the Fund.

We also hail the activities of the Banyan Fund Association, which, although it is an autonomous and private organization, is playing an important role in exploring possibilities for gathering funds for developing countries.

The ageing of our populations has quickly become as worrying a problem as development, especially since by the year 2005 persons aged 60 years or more will comprise 10 per cent of the world's population, and the majority of them will be living in developing countries. The social and economic impact of these demographic changes in the third world, especially in Africa, requires innovative and concrete measures.

Here it is interesting to note the role of the African Society of Gerontology, a voluntary association encompassing people and organizations concerned with the ageing of African populations. Nevertheless, faced with the broad scope of the current situation of the elderly in our continent and the serious problems exacerbated by conflicts, extreme poverty, the exodus from the land, waves of refugees and displaced persons and the deterioration of health care, the Senegalese delegation believes that the creation of an African institute on ageing should be contemplated. Following the model of the Malta Institute, and with sustained financial support, it could play a crucial role in the protection and advancement of the elderly in Africa.

(Mr. Baro, Senegal)

The size of the problem of the ageing of the world's population and the effective implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing require a more integrated United Nations role for the advancement of the elderly. The United Nations should ensure international and multisectoral coordination in the Plan's implementation. Therefore, the third report on ageing, which will appear in 1997, should take into account this question of coordinating activities in the implementation of the United Nations programme in this regard.

Furthermore, major forthcoming meetings will have to take due account of issues of ageing. I have in mind here the International Year of the Family, 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, the world summit for social development, planned for the beginning of 1995, and the World Conference on Women, to be held in June 1995. These meetings should allow for specific measures for the implementation of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

Senegal is a sponsor of draft resolution A/47/L.5/Rev.1, entitled "Proclamation on Ageing". It hopes that the General Assembly will unanimously adopt this text, which gives a practical strategy for ageing for the decade 1992-2001.

Our delegation's full support for the draft resolution is based largely on Senegal's dedication to defending values of traditional African society, where the aged symbolize wisdom, constitute a source of inspiration and set an example for the younger generation. These are values shared by the African peoples in general. As the late Malian writer, Amadou Hampate Ba stated: "Every time an old person dies a library goes up in flames".

Mr. ALVAREZ (Argentina) (interpretation from Spanish): The delegation of the Argentine Republic would like at the outset, through me, to thank the Chairman of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Permanent Representative of Uruguay, for the remarks he made in his statement yesterday on the pioneer attitude of our country regarding the rights of the elderly.

Indeed, on 23 November 1948, a few months after announcing the Bill of Rights for the Aged, which in 1949 was incorporated into the Constitution, Mrs. Eva Peron, wife of the then President of Argentina, addressed to the world, and in particular to the United Nations, a message in which, on behalf of defenceless older people, she asked for international recognition of their rights. There then began a long series of statements, specialized technical work, international cooperation and national efforts to make this aspiration a reality.

Much time has elapsed and many changes have taken place since then. Some countries, such as Argentina, have seen an accelerated growth of their older population because of the beneficial effect of greater life expectancy accompanied by a low birth rate, which is depriving the elderly of proper support and protection by the younger generation. Other societies have, like Argentina, had their policies on ageing adversely affected by the cumulative effect of the deterioration in the terms of trade, the external debt and the unjust distribution of income. Another problem results from the appearance in recent decades of treatment of older persons involving separation from their families, exclusion from the community and impersonal provision of assistance.

(Mr. Alvarez, Argentina)

The voice of the international community was raised against all these problems in 1982, when the International Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted. Ten years later the General Assembly is meeting to evaluate what has been done, to give impetus to new actions and particularly to keep up the concern of all countries of the painful problem of the ageing of mankind as a whole. It is not a matter of some countries being young and others being old, nor of specific situations affecting one region or another: the whole world, according to the detailed figures given here, discerns signs of great demographic change with the dawn of the third millennium.

This reality, which affects all mankind, requires joint, consistent responses. Each country, each region and the international community as a whole must give priority to solutions in the framework of comprehensive social development policies. It is important to include the social conditions of the elderly in the agenda of the proposed world social summit for social development, the holding of which the Argentine Republic enthusiastically supports.

Progress must also be made at the technical level, particularly on the fact that all treatment of the elderly must be based on the values of family and community solidarity. A good example has been given to us here by less technically and economically developed countries which know how to keep a place for the elderly in social life.

(Mr. Alvarez, Argentina)

This compels us to ponder the root causes of the difficulties in integrating older persons into the life of those societies that claim to be the most developed, and that are precisely the ones with the greatest number of elderly persons. It is not a lack of economic means nor the unfair distribution of wealth that primarily impedes their integration. Those problems, which are invariably present in the developing world and in large segments of richer societies, put obstacles in the way of attending to the elderly, but the problems of alienation and abandonment on the part of the family and community should also be recalled. There is a cultural attitude clearly indicated by the Secretary-General, that seems to result in disrespect for the old and traditional merely because they are old and traditional, and too much regard for change, what is novel and what is young, without regard to their worth or defects. Where there is such a cultural attitude, it is but a short step from disrepect for the old to the abandonment of elderly people. Our societies must not take that step.

To sum up, the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Plan of Action on Ageing must lead us to overcome the social and economic obstacles in the way of the elderly, to improve professional attitudes towards them as part of community values and, above all, to propose a thorough review of the social and cultural aspects and ethical attitudes that prevent the elderly from participating fully in the life of their peoples.

In conclusion, our delegation firmly supports the proposed proclamation on ageing that is before the Assembly for consideration, and we pledge our most sincere efforts to give it practical effect.

Mr. MAKA (Zambia): We are meeting to observe the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing by the World

(Mr. Maka, Zambia)

Assembly on Ageing in 1982, which was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in December of that year. The international conference will be successful to the extent that it enhances national and international efforts aimed at enabling older persons to lead full and productive lives in their respective societies and, above all, at improving the quality of their lives.

It has been estimated that by the year 2001 the world population will be 6.3 billion, and that one in every 10 persons will be 60 years of age or older. Population ageing has been evident in developed countries and is becoming increasingly so in developing countries. While indicative of an improvement in the human condition, it has brought with it new challenges for Governments, challenges that demand new policy approaches. These range from the changing of attitudes to the provision of basic requirements, particularly in health and housing.

Since the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing a lot of work has been done by the United Nations system, Governments and interested non-governmental organizations. It is evident from the documentation before us that the problem of ageing has no boundaries. The appreciation of the impact of ageing on society in the past differed between the developed and the developing countries, basically because of the traditional family structure. In developing countries such as my own, older people found refuge in the extended family structure. The extended family structure was and still is a good thing, which should be encouraged by Governments wherever it exists. But, with increased urbanization, it has been proved that this approach can no longer be sustained. This is a fact that we in Zambia have not only recognized but that we must also address urgently, particularly as our population is one of the most highly urbanized in sub-Saharan Africa.

(Mr. Maka, Zambia)

Because of the extended family structure, little has been done in my country to address the special needs of our senior citizens. So far only three homes exist for the aged. These homes were established by the colonial Government to take care of the aged settlers. On independence the homes were opened to all citizens and residents.

As in the case of disabled persons, my Government is in the process of overhauling legal and institutional mechanisms for improving the welfare of the elderly members of our society. Through the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, steps are being taken to build an information data base, which is vital for proper policy formulation. Our approach is to work very closely with the non-governmental organizations concerned with the welfare of the elderly and to assist such organizations financially for the benefit of the aged. Thus the elderly are benefiting a great deal from the public welfare assistance scheme, which has been established as a safety net to cushion the effects of the economic structural adjustment programme.

The full protection and promotion of the human rights of the elderly is our point of departure, because we recognize that it is the only way by which improvements in the status of the elderly can be guaranteed. Protection of these rights has to be entrenched in appropriate legislation, which must be followed by effective implementation.

As I have said, my Government is making a fresh start on issues relating to the elderly. We therefore find our participation in this international conference on ageing particularly valuable. We have found particularly inspiring the experience gained by various countries and the United Nations in their efforts to implement the International Plan of Action on Ageing during the decade 1982 to 1991. While recognizing that the goals of the Plan have

(Mr. Maka, Zambia)

not been reached, we are encouraged that a firm foundation has at least been laid for future action. The global information campaign on ageing mounted for 1992 and beyond has succeeded in raising public awareness, and this should continue.

(Mr. Maka, Zambia)

The observance of 1 October as International Day for the Elderly, which began last year, 1991, has also contributed to this public information campaign. My delegation therefore supports the Secretary-General's proposal that to promote the Day in the next three years activities be related to major United Nations conferences or events, as follows: first, for 1993, human rights for older people and indigenous knowledge and skills of older persons be related to the World Conference on Human Rights and to the observance of International Year for the World's Indigenous People, both to take place in 1993; second, in 1994 population ageing and development and ageing and the family be related to the International Conference on Population and Development and the International Year of the Family; third, in 1995 older women and international solidarity be the themes in relation to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year.

My delegation has carefully studied the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Global targets on ageing for the year 2001: a practical strategy". Our initial reaction is that the eight global targets identified provide a good basis for action at both the international and the national levels.

In conclusion, I would state what is indeed obvious: the need for adequate financial and other resources to translate the proposed targets into action. The Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, as the United Nations focal point on ageing, should accordingly be enabled to meet the mandates assigned to it.

Developing countries will also need international assistance to implement national targets on ageing which they will have identified. For a country like my own, having a poor economy and expeiencing drought, targets for the

(Mr. Maka, Zambia)

elderly will only add to the many priority needs the Government will have before it but which it will have no capacity to address due to financial constraints. The generous assistance of the international community will therefore go a long way in enabling us to improve the welfare of our senior citizens, as envisaged in the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

Mr. MARUYAMA (Japan): My delegation would like to join the previous speakers in celebrating the tenth anniversary of the International Plan of Action on Ageing. It is a pleasure to be able to participate in the debate at these special meetings of the General Assembly.

Ageing is a social development issue in which the United Nations has played an important advocacy role. In August 1982 the Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted at the World Assembly on Ageing, and was subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session. The Plan provides basic policy guidelines for the international community to follow, and has served to raise awareness as to the seriousness and complexity of the problem at the national, regional and international levels. To accelerate implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, at its forty-sixth session the General Assembly called for a set of global targets on ageing for the year 2001.

While Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations have been making strenuous efforts in this area, their achievements are being overshadowed by the rapidity with which the world population is ageing. The elderly are the fastest growing segment of the world's population, and with demographic change proceeding at such a pace it is essential that the international community renew its commitment to making collaborative efforts to address the problem.

(Mr. Maruyama, Japan)

As a longer life span is a reflection of improvements in living conditions, a society must adjust its social and economic systems to ensure that the aged lead healthy meaningful lives. The employment and participation in society of the elderly must be encouraged, and the systems that provide education, social security and health care should be modified to meet their needs. My delegation believes it is the responsibility of society as a whole to ensure that the aged are active participants in the community, that they do not become a marginalized group. Their experience and wisdom are most valuable national assets and could be better utilized if they were integrated into the process of social and economic development. Society should address the problem of ageing not only by trying to meet the immediate material needs of the elderly but also by focusing on their psychological needs. Opportunities to participate more actively in society help to give them a sense of self-esteem and personal worth, and at the same time allow younger generations to benefit from their experience and expertise.

In Japan, as a result of the improvement of medical and health care standards, the average life expectancy has risen to 80 years, the highest in the world. As a result, however, it is predicted that early in the next century one out of four people in Japan will be over 65 years old. Naturally, it is of the greatest importance to ensure that this expanding part of the population live healthy, comfortable lives participating in and contributing to society. It was for this reason that the Government of Japan set up a Committee on Ageing composed of the relevant Cabinet ministers, formulated the Guidelines on Policy for a Society of Longevity, and strenuously promoted measures based on them.

(Mr. Maruyama, Japan)

As the growing population of the elderly influences the social and economic structure, each country will have to explore approaches to the prblem that take into account its own social, historical and economic conditions. This is indeed a challenging task, but it poses especially great difficulties for those countries with limited resources. In order to facilitate efforts at the national level, therefore, it is important to identify the most common problems and concentrate international collaboration on addressing them, so that every country will be aided in formulating its national programme.

My delegation notes that work on the issue of ageing, as it is closely interconnected with other issues of social development, including the role of the family, people with disabilities, aged women, poverty and human rights, is going forward at a number of organizations within the United Nations system. Because it is such a multi-faceted problem, comprehensive approaches will have to be developed.

This issue is potentially the most important we shall have to address in the next century. It is not the concern of one age group alone, but a challenge each of us must face sooner or later. It has wide social implications, and will affect future generations. If we are to meet that challenge, it will require the concerted efforts of Governments, local communities, and international and non-governmental organizations.

Prince DLAMINI (Swaziland): I am pleased to take this opportunity to address the Assembly once again on behalf of His Majesty King Mswati III, the Government and the nation of the Kingdom of Swaziland.

The celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing has led to an international awareness of the needs and problems of ageing persons. While yesterday ageing was simply a function of time, today it is influenced by economic frustration; the inaccessibility of jobs; chronic, incurable diseases; and other social constraints. My country has not been spared the factors that influence ageing. We, too, are experiencing a rise in the ageing population due to increased nutritional and medical awareness, which has resulted in a greater life expectancy for our population.

While it is true that Swaziland is a traditional society and places great emphasis on the role played by the extended family system, it goes without saying that, due to urbanization and industrialization, there has emerged a group of elderly persons needing to receive care and assistance from the State through non-governmental organizations, as a result of the disintegration of the family unit.

Swaziland does not favour the philosophy or practice of institutionalizing its ageing persons, particularly as this practice goes totally against our culture and customs. Not only that, human experience has shown that development that runs counter to the traditional and cultural values of a particular society does not bear the intended fruits.

It is said that the virtues and advantages of urbanization and industrialization are inseparable from the waning and stripping of certain elements or features of our social and moral fibre, to the detriment of both

(Prince Dlamini, Swaziland)

our traditional and cultural norms. The breakdown of the family unit and the resulting ostracism and neglect of the elderly, especially in our developing countries, is being blamed on urbanization. Under no circumstances, unless it is inevitable, should we encourage uprooting our senior citizens from their familiar surroundings and placing them in strange and possibly hostile environments.

As the Government is concerned about the needs of this segment of the population - persons aged 65 and over - some help in terms of public assistance is provided to those who are economically and financially disadvantaged. Approximately 30,000 people in my country are currently benefiting from this programme.

Apart from the Government, a variety of non-governmental organizations offer various forms of assistance to the elderly. These organizations include church groups, the Association of Swaziland Retired Civil Servants and others that address the requirements and problems of ageing persons by providing material assistance to those in need. They make regular visits to the homes of the elderly in rural areas, after having identified them through local leaders. Assistance might take the form of repairs or of constructing new homesteads with labour provided by community members, including our youth, as members of scout troops and boys' brigades.

Community leaders at the grass-roots level, where the people are, are familiar with the needs of the local population and are entrusted with the responsibility of identifying the ageing and referring them to the nearest appropriate social welfare office so that they may be registered for eventual assistance. Working hand in hand with local authorities and non-governmental organizations, this system in Swaziland has proved efficient in identifying

(Prince Dlamini, Swaziland)

and rendering assistance, however meagre, to the elderly. We have been able to offer some financial assistance to the non-governmental organizations concerned.

Many ways of making the lives of ageing persons comfortable are envisaged, but lack of resources is both a constraint and a hindrance. I therefore appeal to the international community to assist countries, especially developing countries such as Swaziland, to train more of our community and social workers, who would then be better equipped to deal with the issue. In any event, we hope and believe that with the assistance of the international community we can and will eventually realize our goal of making the twilight years of our senior citizens fulfilled, dignified and fruitful.

Society's neglect of the elderly is not only a human tragedy, one clearly questionable on religious grounds, but also a sad example of ingratitude to our parents, who invested so much in our upbringing to maturity. This cruel and malicious attitude should be abandoned - and not only for our own sake, as old age will surely catch up with us; it must be wiped out permanently, as it negates all the virtues that mankind accrues to its honour.

Human history is that man has always lived and prospered by the sweat of others and that he has always been reluctant to come to the rescue of those who are less fortunate. The proof is in the dilly-dallying attitude of Governments and politicians towards the plight of those members of our communities who suffer from disabilities. But we must remember again that, unlike mental and physical disabilities, problems that we all would like to believe cannot befall us, we are talking here about the process of ageing, a

(Prince Dlamini, Swaziland)

natural phenomenon that nature cannot help but allow to take its course. In other words, we are addressing this problem not only for those who are already elderly, but for us and all of humankind as well.*

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* Mr. Hayes (Ireland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

(Prince Dlamini, Swaziland)

It would therefore be far-sighted of the Assembly and all the Governments of the world to exert themselves to the maximum in trying to resolve the problem of ageing. With the passing of time, those of us who debated this item 10 years ago and at this conference will look back with pride and declare with honour that solving the problems of the aged was indeed a worthwhile, long-term investment.

Mrs. CASTRO DE BARISH (Costa Rica) (interpretation from Spanish): In his statement on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, its Chairman, Ambassador Ramiro Píris Ballon, Permanent Representative of Uruguay, expressed with eloquence, clarity and great sensitivity our Group's thoughts about the important subject of ageing, as the Assembly began its celebration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Plan of Action on Ageing.

My delegation fully supports that statement, in which we were rightly reminded that one State member of our group, Argentina, emphasized with great vision the importance of this question and introduced a draft Declaration on the Rights of the Elderly in 1948, the year when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted.

My delegation also wishes to emphasize how important it is, in order to respond to the needs of our region, to establish in Latin America and the Caribbean an institute on ageing like the one that already exists in Malta.

At this stage of the debate my delegation will speak of the most vulnerable of the senior citizens, who as we know, form a group that is in itself vulnerable. I refer in particular to older and elderly women and the roles they have played in the family in various cultures and civilizations since time immemorial.

(Mrs. Castro de Barish, Costa Rica)

Among the important landmarks of the 1990s, 1994 has been proclaimed the International Year of the Family by the General Assembly. There is no doubt that resolutions will be adopted based on initiatives and proposals responding to the need to strengthen the family and the values on which it is founded and that must sustain it. We must emphasize that in that basic social unit older and elderly women have played and continue to play a very special role. It is also fitting to mention another aspect: within the social group of older and elderly men and women it is women who have the worst of a difficult, complex situation, which had until recent years been ignored.

As has already been mentioned, the ageing of populations is today a world-wide phenomenon, pronounced in some parts of the world and incipient in others. We believe it is necessary to focus on the role of older and elderly women in the family and the situation in which millions of women live, mainly, but not exclusively, in developing countries.

The report prepared for the meeting of the Consultative Group on "Middle-Aged and Older Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: The Current Situation and Its Political Consequences", jointly organized by the American Association of Retired Persons and the Pan-American Health Organization and held in Washington, D.C., from 18 to 20 October 1988, containing some important observations that help us understand the situation a little better. It tells us:

> "Little is known about the segment of the population that is made up of older women - between ages 40 and 59 - and elderly women - aged 60 and above - in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although women over 40 years of age constitute a relatively small percentage of the population - from

(Mrs. Castro de Barish, Costa Rica)

9 per cent to 20 per cent - in the countries of the region, absolute figures are high and are on the rise. Since the population of Latin America and the Caribbean is relatively young, little attention has been paid so far to older and elderly women in research-related or service-related activities. Only recently has work begun to analyse census statistics by sex and age, although services for women are still oriented more towards maternity problems than towards chronic disease."

The study offers some important conclusions, such as the following:

"Older and elderly women play a key role in both economic development and family stability in the region, much more so than one would expect from their numbers. This is so much the case that if their productive endeavours and their role as care-takers were suddenly taken away, the effect on the economy and social structure of the region would be devastating."

Why are they so important? The central role of older and elderly women is explained by the fact that at the same time as they serve as the family's economic and emotional base, they have a series of relationships of dependency with husband, father, brothers and sons. They have to balance the needs of the family unit and the needs of its individuals, all the while holding a subordinate position relative to the men in the household. There would seem to be some truth in the belief that only in old age is a woman allowed to be herself and to look after herself - if she is lucky, at that.

Another important conclusion of the study is that:

"Women's life expectancy is also increasing in the region, and it is expected to exceed an average of 71 years in the year 2000."

(Mrs. Castro de Barish, Costa Rica)

That figure, which is in accord with statistics mentioned here by many previous speakers, is forecast in spite of a workload twice or three times that of most women of comparable age in the developed countries and despite a probable history of multiple pregnancies, chronic anaemia, non-existent preventive care and inadequate medical services. This capacity of older and elderly women in Latin America and the Caribbean to resist the enormous physical and emotional pressures in their lives is one of the most interesting and encouraging conclusions of the study.

(Mrs. Castro de Barish, Costa Rica)

The research includes that of a small group of researchers who have begun to focus on specific experiences which are universal among older and elderly women; they are trying to define and describe the qualities and characteristics of these experiences, which include menopause and sexuality. Widowhood, though not universal, is quite common and has also been the object of research; it seems to be a very fruitful line.

My delegation applauds the efforts of the Pan-American Health Organization in promoting research on the situation and living conditions of elderly women and their health needs and social services needs. We acknowledge the tireless devotion to the problem shown by Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez, Alternate Representative of the Dominican Republic, whose contribution to the agenda item on ageing has been amply recognized at the United Nations.

Costa Rica associates itself with the purposes and concepts, as well as the suggestions and guidelines, contained in document A/47/L.5/Rev.1, which we have the honour of sponsoring, entitled "Proclamation on Ageing". We wish to emphasize that joint efforts of the public and private sectors will be very valuable in implementing the Proclamation and the International Plan of Action on Ageing, the anniversary of whose adoption we are celebrating, and we must encourage an increase in such efforts. Here I refer specifically to the important support from the recently created Banyan Fund for the efforts to promote activities that will make it possible for older persons to remain both socially and economically independent.

(Mrs. Castro de Barish, Costa Rica)

We hope that we can rely on the political will to face global ageing in the coming decades, which

"will require a revolution in both thinking and feeling."

(A/47/PV.39, p. 37)

I conclude by expressing Costa Rica's support for proclaiming 1999 - the start of the era of ageing, at the dawn of the new century - the International Year of Older Persons.

The PRESIDENT: We have heard the last speaker in the debate.

We shall now proceed to consider the draft resolution contained in document A/47/L.5/Rev.1.

Mrs. TAVARES DE ALVAREZ (Dominican Republic) (interpretation from Spanish): At the request of some delegations, having held consultations with the other sponsors we have decided to propose two amendments to the draft resolution contained in document A/47/L.5/Rev.1.

The first amendment is to delete the first line of paragraph 1 (1) of the annex, which reads:

"To intensify efforts to advance disarmament programmes and to ...".

The paragraph will now read:

"To provide the immense human and material resources now urgently needed for adjustments to humanity's coming of age, which can be understood as a demographic phenomenon but also as a social, economic and cultural one of great promise;".

The second amendment is paragraph 3, the last paragraph of the annex. It is to insert after "Older Persons" the following words:

"from the resources of the regular budget for the 1998-1999 biennium and from voluntary contributions."

(Mrs. Tavares de Alvarez, Dominican Republic)

The rest of the paragraph will remain as it stands. I have given these amendments in writing to the Secretariat.

I also wish to inform the Assembly that the delegation of Viet Nam has joined the sponsor of the draft resolution.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank all the delegations that have offered their support and cooperation to make the "Proclamation on Ageing" in 1992 a reality.

The PRESIDENT: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution in document A/47/L.5/Rev.1.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt resolution A/47/L.5/Rev.1 as orally amended by the representative of the Dominican Republic?

Draft resolution A/47/L.5/Rev.1, as orally amended, was adopted (resolution 47/5).

The PRESIDENT: The General Assembly has thus concluded this international conference on ageing, which has sought to consolidate a set of targets on ageing for the year 2001 and to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

I therefore declare closed this special commemoration.

PROGRAMME OF WORK

The PRESIDENT: I should like to inform representatives that the Assembly will consider agenda item 148, "Emergency assistance to the Philippines," on Wednesday, 21 October, as the last item in the afternoon.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.